

Interviewee: Kathleen O'Connor
Interviewers: Andrew Harmon, Nathan Masse
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Abstract: Kathleen O'Connor was born in the Elm Park area of Worcester in 1950, and has lived in Worcester for most of her life. Kathleen discusses her life and memories of growing up in Worcester. She describes how the city has changed over her life, including the closing and opening of stores, facilities, etc., as well as the future plans for the city, what she thinks of it, and what she recommends for the city. Kathleen explains her experience in education, describes how the educational system has changed from what it was, and how it has become more friendly towards women. Kathleen then elaborates on work experience and how she came to work at a law firm. Kathleen says that working at a law firm was tough for her, having to balance time for work with time for her children and her husband, who was in declining health. Kathleen also shares personal memories, how the Vietnam War educational strikes inspired her to pursue law, and how her family life affected her education.

AH: We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester [Massachusetts] women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics and community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with education. Thank you for your help with this important project. What is your full maiden name and, if applicable, your married name?

KO'C: My maiden name is Kathleen Ellen O'Connor, and that's the name I use right now.

AH: When were you born?

K'OC: I was born in 1950.

AH: Have you ever married?

K'OC: Yes.

AH: What is the name of your current husband, or previous husband?

K'OC: Current husband is Thomas Ritacco , and I was widowed and my previous husband—my deceased husband—was Rudolph Zlody, Z-L-O-D-Y.

AH: Do you have children?

K'OC: I do, I have two.

AH: And what are their names?

K'OC: [names of children removed at interviewee's request]... Zlody.

AH: Do you have grandchildren?

K'OC: No I do not.

AH: What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with? Like, family background?

K'OC: Irish [pause] Caucasian [pause] both parents have Irish ethnicities.

AH: [chuckles] that was my next question... tell me about your parents.

K'OC: My mother was born in Hartford, Connecticut, and grew up primarily in Ridgefield, Connecticut, in a family of eight children, and in a fairly—for the time—a fairly well-off [pause] economic background, and she went to Cushing Academy in Ashburnham, Massachusetts, and then came to Boston to go to college, and met my father in Boston. My father was born in Worcester and raised in the Elm Park area of Worcester, and was educated here and went to Bentley [University], when Bentley was an accounting school, long before it was a college—and I think now it's a university—and he commuted from Worcester on the train to go into Bentley—which was in Boston. So he was an accountant, and he worked at Riley Stoker Corporation. His office was located where the Best Buy is at the Greendale Mall—his office was knocked down to build the Greendale Mall. It's now Babcock Power, his company.

AH: Where have you lived during your life? Did you grow up in Worcester? Where was your neighborhood?

K'OC: Well I lived in several places but I grew up in Worcester, I was born in the Elm Park area—in fact I have great memories of going there to play and catch the geese and all of that—go skating there and so forth—and we moved to the Tatnuck area when I was about four. And other places that I've lived in... I've lived in Florida, and I've lived in Philadelphia.

AH: What was the neighborhood like, generally?

K'OC: Where I was born?

AH: [mhm]

K'OC: It was very pleasant, I lived in a three-decker, and my grandmother—the reason we lived in that neighborhood was, when my father was in the service—in World War II—he saved money and sent it back to his mother, and said “buy me a house” because he figured that, when World War II was over, every man that was in the war was going to come home, get married, and want a house. So his mother purchased the house for him before he got out of the war; So he lived in a three-decker, and it was very residential, very nice families... I still know some of the people that I grew up across the street from. [pause] And Tatnuck was very similar, very nice—not as busy as it is today—it’s grown up a lot, if you’re familiar with it.

NM: Do you still live in the city—in Worcester?

K'OC: No, I live in Holden [Massachusetts], but my office is in Worcester.

AH: Since you [pause] ...So how did you come to live in Worcester after having lived in so many different places?

K'OC: Well it was home [emphasis on ‘home’], I [pause] was a teacher first—as my first profession—and I moved to Florida in 1974, and I taught there then I went to Philadelphia to go to law school, and practiced law there for two years after law school, and then decided to come home!

NM: And do you still have family in Worcester?

K'OC: Yes. All of my siblings live in the Worcester area—one in Worcester, one in Rutland [Massachusetts], and one in—no two in Worcester, sorry—and one in Rutland. [pause] and my parents are deceased. [pause]

AH: What challenges do you think this city still faces? What would you change about the city?

K'OC: I think the thoughts that are in place—or the plans that are in place—are going in the right direction in terms of bringing the activity back to the center. I think that one of the largest mistakes that was made was [pause] when the Auburn Mall was built—it was the first mall in this area—it was the first concept [emphasis on ‘concept’] of mall—and prior to that, Main Street was full of stores, and people walked to the stores, and the concept of the mall came in and people were very attracted to the idea of having a [pause] place that you could be inside—and that was an improvement—but at the time I was working in a very exclusive department store downtown when I was in college, and the Auburn Mall was the end of all these wonderful stores downtown that everybody went

to—every Saturday—and then it got worse when the Worcester Mall was built—which had different names, I think was called the Galleria in Worcester Center and I can't remember what order—but, I think knocking that down and starting over and attempting to bring people into the city and apartments and so forth will be a great improvement, but... the second thing that is already being talked about is the transportation in and out of Boston [Massachusetts]—more and more people are commuting—and [pause] the fact that you can't even go into Boston —get on a train—go into Boston and go for a show, and then be back the same day and have reasonable times for the trains is just too bad, because I think more of us would do that. So I think things are going in the right direction—I happen to love Worcester, I love living here, and I think it has a great cultural base and I think it has a... a great deal to do [emphasis on 'do'], you just have to look for it. You have to know where to go and be willing to, you know, look for it. But, I think Worcester is a wonderful place.

NM: You already sort of answered the next questions, but... what changes have you seen in Worcester? And, what do you think will—women's experiences in Worcester have been generally? [pause] that's probably gonna be--

K'OC: [cuts in] That's a lot of questions!

NM: Yeah, it's gonna be—

K'OC: What changes... I think one of the major changes is there's so much more traffic now than there was—I remember when I first started driving in Worcester thinking, “We don't have any traffic like the bigger cities do”. And I think it's just because every household has... everyone owns a vehicle and, it's just increased... so it takes longer to get places. But I don't think that's a major, major problem it certainly is a difference. [pause] I don't know I think one of the things that's—to answer your question in the reverse—I think one of the things that's been consistent in Worcester is that it's very parochial—and by that I mean it's neighborhood-driven and, if you've grown up in Worcester, you know everybody, even though it's a pretty large city—population-wise—I see somebody I know everywhere I go. So that makes it feel like a very small place to live, and I think that's very nice.

AH: [Hm] ...Sort of answered this question too. What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

K'OC: Well I think one of the biggest things is the colleges. We really have a brain trust around here, and we're glad when the college students choose to stay. [pause] We have tremendous medical facilities, and research facilities. We've always been known for a big industrial base—I mean the company my father worked for, which is now Babcock Power... Norton Company -- which is now Saint Gobain -- Heald, they've all got new names, but... since Micron, or whatever—all of those companies were where all of our fathers worked. Some as trade-skilled labor, and some as, you know, more white collar.

AH: Where did you attend school? What were the names of the schools? Did you attend college? And name and programs you—

K'OC: Well I went... almost all of my education took place in Worcester. I started out at Tatnuck School on Pleasant Street in the Tatnuck area. My father had gone there, my grandfather had gone there, my grandfather had built a house behind it, my father had actually lived in a house when he was a little boy next to the playground, which is probably why he moved us back to Tatnuck. I went then to Chandler Junior High, which is now called Chandler Magnet School. I went to Classical High School—which no longer exists—I was in the last sophomore class at Classical; and we didn't have a cafeteria, we didn't have a gym. We used to walk to The Y [YWCA]—that was great because we used to get let off out of the school on gym days—and we went to the Y—the boys went to the YMCA... I can't remember where it was located; it doesn't exist anymore but the YWCA near the library, that's where the girls would go. And [pause] so everybody came from neighborhoods all over the city, so we were all downtown, so then afterschool you walked around downtown or did things down there. And then they built Doherty High School and they combined the kids from Classical High School—which was an academic high school, it was for college-bound students—and Commerce High School, which was more for students who would not probably go to college and they gave them business training and trades... some trade training. They were the *arch rivals*, they were the two best sports teams in the city, and they combined them both into one school. So you can imagine that that was a little challenging. But it was interesting. So I was in the first class—first junior class at Doherty and the second class to graduate—and we still have wonderful reunions.

NM: And did you say you went to school in Philadelphia?

K'OC: Well, no, first I went right from Doherty, I went to Worcester State [College], as I mentioned before, I would have *loved* to have gone to Holy Cross [College of the Holy Cross], but women were not admitted at that time—it was being *thought of* and talked about—so I went to Worcester State because I was going to be a teacher. And I think this is one of the things that was very different at that time was that, for women, the educational and career opportunities were pretty limited—or at least we were *told* that they were limited—to teaching, [pause] nursing, [pause]

NM: Probably, secretarial—

K'OC: [cuts in] and secretarial, that was about it. And if... and I—my father told me when I was five years old that I was gonna go to Worcester State, so I just did. But the... I forgot what my track was, sorry...

AH: Well since, Assumption and Holy Cross were all male...

K'OC: oh yes.

AH: Did [clears throat] if it... were, lots of private schools all male at the time or...?

K'OC: Almost all of them were—well no, there was, there was some... it was really, mostly women's schools and men's schools, they were pretty much divided. Worcester State was co-ed. But the other thing—I know what I was thinking—the other thing that was very significant, I think, or different from your experience now is: I never *thought* about going out of Worcester to school. I don't remember *any* of my friends leaving Worcester to go to college. Except the big draw for me, was UMass Amherst [University of Massachusetts Amherst]. And I can't remember when that had opened, but I, I... did wanna be a teacher—I was planning on elementary school teaching—and there was a lot going on in education at that time, a lot of advanced thinking for the time—like the open classroom was just being invented [laughs], or thought about—and UMass Amherst had a wonderful program, and my parents said, “No, you can't—there's no way you can go away—we can't afford to send you, there's no way you can live in a dormitory.” So I lived at home, and I went to Worcester State. Most of my friends—who are still my friends today, or, generally—they went to one of the Worcester schools. Some of them might have come to Assumption [College], or Holy Cross [College of the Holy Cross], if you were male. My husband now went to Clark [University]... He had the same experience: it had never occurred to him to go anywhere else, it's a very different, you know, community. So, did that answer your question? And then I went, after Worcester State, I taught in Spencer, Massachusetts—which is one of the towns outside of here—and I decided I might want to get my Master of Arts in Teaching English and to add that to my experience, so, I came here, to Assumption, and started my Master's degree here. But, in the next year I decided I wanted to leave this area, and went to Florida, so I, you know, but I do have [pause] memories of coming here, for a few classes.

AH: How were you—I think you may have answered some of this question already—how were girls treated when you were in school? Besides just being separated, as you said, like the schools being [pause] separated by gender or...

K'OC: Well the elementary and... elementary level we were, and, you know, right through high school we were co-ed. [pause] I don't have any really *adverse* memories of being taught... feeling like I was treated differently because I was a girl. I was a good student, so I think my teachers liked me because I did well, so I don't particularly remember anything... *other than* being encouraged to do only certain things. If you were a girl, as I said, you were sent to those particular careers. And the big thing for me as I look backwards, was there were no girls sports other than field hockey, and maybe volleyball, and those were things—and basketball—and those were things that—like I would have been interested in track if I were able to turn back the clock—I excelled in the test, you know, that... they would give us tests in the broad jump and running and all of that, and... but before Title IX or whatever it is, girls did not have the same opportunities for sports.

AH: What were your challenges in education? Like, were there specific difficulties or circumstances that you found or experienced while in high school or college?

K'OC: I think my worst time in education was junior high. I think that's probably true of most people! I went—the schools that fed Chandler Junior High were Tatnuck School, May Street School, and Midland Street School, maybe some others, maybe Flagg Street School—I don't know if you're familiar with any of these—those were all—those at the time—were all in pretty educated areas—in other words, the parents—most of our parents—were reasonably educated—so there were a lot of good students, and I was put into a very high-achieving group, and I was totally overwhelmed, because in some of the other schools they had more experience with homework—like, it wasn't common then to have homework in elementary school—we'd have little projects—so I was overwhelmed academically, and I liked the school, I liked my new friends, but I remember that being the worst [pause] academic time for me. Finally I figured it out, I think, by my third year in junior high [laughs]. But, in high school I always worked at the same time as going to school, so I was very active I guess.

AH: So what were some of the jobs you worked at?

K'OC: My very first job... my father gave me a job for my 16th birthday [laughs]. I turned 16 on March 27th and on April first I started my first job which was in a supermarket—and it doesn't exist anymore. It was called “The Big D”—Big Discount—and it was down on Mill Street. We lived on one end of Mill Street and the supermarket was down at the other end. And my uncle was a butcher for that market chain, which is—so he spoke to the manager and got me an interview—and I was hired that day, and it was a wonderful job, I made a lot of friends, and it was interesting. And then I was asked—there was this little supermarket, like a neighborhood grocery store right across the street from my house—and the owner found out that I had been trained as a cashier at the big supermarket and he asked me if I wanted to work for him; which I did, so that was in high school. And I can't remember the precise order of all of this, but I lifeguarded in the summers for the city pools--which are now all being closed—I was in the lifeguard staff that opened those, and worked there for many summers. And then in the winter I'd go back to the supermarket circuit, and [laughs] they were good jobs, it was fun.

AH: There was a question I meant to ask, but... Were private—were public colleges mostly co-ed, or were some public colleges also split by gender?

K'OC: I don't remember any public colleges being split. One of the things—can I backtrack a little?—one of the things, when you asked about opportunities—and this is not a reflection in it, or in any way that I'm upset with my father, I don't want to interpret it that way—but, I had two brothers growing up—I had three, but, the third one didn't come along for a while—and my father used to say to me: “Well, you're going to Worcester State, because that's all we can afford for you, because your brothers might

want to go to medical school.” So, it was *cultural* then. I think there were very few women who were made to feel that they could go on to some of the higher professions. And the feeling was that women needed a job which they could, quote, ‘fall back on’: meaning [pause] the plan of your life was to be: get married, your husband will support you, but you won’t be able to work while you have children, and then, if something happens to your husband, you could fall back on—or after your children are grown—you would then be able to fall back on your teaching job or your secretarial job, or your nursing job. So, I remember applying—I literally had scholarships to Worcester State—and I remember doing this, I remember writing out on my application for the scholarship that I needed to get a scholarship because my brothers might need to go to medical school.

NM: And were your brothers older or younger than you?

K’OC: Younger.

AH: And did they go to medical school?

K’OC: As a matter of fact, [pause] no. [all laugh]

AH: That’s what I thought!

NM: Yeah.

AH: Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

K’OC: Well my first formal education, which was, Worcester State. I was very lucky I—at the time, it was a challenge to get a teaching job—and I was offered several in this area—and this is for elementary education. So I was lucky to get [pause] to get a good job. So, I didn’t see—this is another thing that is different today: It never occurred to me to go somewhere else, it never occurred to me to look anywhere but around here—it wasn’t until a couple years later that I thought: “Gee, I wanna get away, I wanna do something on my own,” which is why I moved to Florida.

AH: What support networks and mentoring have been important to you? Like, in the schools you’ve been to, has there been any, like, mentoring or, any kind of—

NM: Or like, support from your parents, or...?

K’OC: My parents were always supportive when I went to Worcester State. They were happy I was doing it. I had a great education at Worcester State, I loved my classes, I had some wonderful teachers, I became close friends with one of my teachers many years later, and she remembered my papers [laughs]. I thought I got good training as a teacher there, but I, I sort of minored in English—meaning it wasn’t a formal minor, but all my

electives I took in English—I had wonderful teachers there, so I never felt like I wasn't supported, we had good student-teaching activities and and that was really where you're mentoring when you're an education major, that's where that came in.

AH: Do you work outside the home? Like, as in... like now, well, you already answered that, because you drive to Worcester for your job...

K'OC: Well, yes, I own a law firm, so, yes! [laughs]

NM: Were you ever a stay-at-home mom?

K'OC: No.

NM: No?

K'OC: I... well I taught for five years, and moved—well I went to Philadelphia for law school—and I can go back to that question later, but—I took four months off with my first child at that time—I was working at a large law firm in Worcester—and went back to work, and I was working 45 hours a week when I returned after having my first child, and I was getting four-fifths pay—because we worked so much more than that for our salary if you were full time—so I had, I took one weekday off, so I received four-fifths pay, but I never stayed at home completely.

AH: If you... since you worked outside the home for wages—oh wait... [mumbles]—well you already answered that, you worked at a supermarket...

NM: How did you come to own the law firm?

K'OC: Well, after the second child—which was four years later—I had been working in a large law firm in Worcester, and I decided that [pause] it was [pause] not—the expectations in a large law firm were [pause] more difficult than I wanted—I didn't have enough freedom—so I started my own firm with another woman whom I had met at the law firm. So we started our own law firm in 1991. She's... she retired in 1995 so I've, you know, had the business ever since and I now have another partner.

AH: So what has this work meant to you? This working in the law firm, how has this affected you?

KO'C: Oh it was completely different. I think—you know, I had only taught for five years and I had never imagined doing anything different than teaching.(pause) But in my fifth year of teaching, I became very interested in the union activity that was going on among the teachers because we were—and we ended up on strike. It was an illegal strike, by the way, and I participated in it just like everyone else and I got very interested in the union functioning and I realized that I wanted more education. And at that time it

seemed that the only advanced education track was to go into administration and that didn't appeal to me at all and it occurred to me one day that, I might want to be a lawyer after watching the lawyers work on the union issues regarding the strike. And—but I wanted to tie the law into education because I still loved everything about education. So I looked for a law school that had a labor activity, not a major, you don't major in anything when you go to law school, but that they had a lot of courses in it and I ended up in Temple University Law School in Philadelphia. And I got exactly the experience that I wanted. That was a huge place for mentoring along the way because it was my labor law teachers who knew I was interested and who introduced me to other lawyers. Or when I was a student got me internships and position with law firms in Philadelphia that worked in labor law. And I work—I ended up representing with the law firm I was working with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, which was precisely what I wanted to do. And Philadelphia was a wonderful place, not only to live but also to work in labor union relations. And I probably would still be there today if I didn't care about coming back to Worcester for family and just to be here.

AH: There was a question I meant to ask. You grew up in a time—you saw the Kent State strikes and how they effected, you know, there was the Vietnam War going on and so—even though women weren't allowed to fight in the war, how did that affect you?

KO'C: It had a huge effect of everybody who was part of that era. Our—collectively, our brothers and boyfriends and friends were subject to the draft, there was a lot—a draft lottery and it depended on you know, when your birthday was, I think it was tied into our—if your birthday was such-and-such-a-date, it might have been number 15 in the lottery which meant you went to Vietnam or you had a college deferment. So the student—there was—it was a very tense and it was students who of all the colleges in this country, who led the protests and who were calling on the country to look at what we were doing, and should we be in Vietnam. And it was a huge issue on campuses and what happened right around the Kent State strikes was—Kent State—what was happening at Kent State was they were protesting like many of the schools were and students were actually taking over the administration building. There were many, many instances, but Columbia's the one that sticks in my head, the students literally took over administration building and just camped out. And, of course, the authorities didn't want any violence to begin and what happened at—was that at Kent State students were protesting and the National Guard was—surrounded the students and I think, as a remember it one of the— all of a sudden there was firing, and it may have been a mistake or it may have been an order, I can't remember; I don't think it was an order but I may be wrong, and I think there were four students killed. And then the entire country erupted, every college campus. I was at Worcester State, and the students at Worcester State, at that time, bothered me in general because they were very uninterested in this whole thing, by and large, there were some that were. The faculty voted to strike: the students voted not to strike, they wanted to have spree day [laughter]. So it was a difficult place for me to be because I had more interest in the political situation, but my father gave me very good advice: he said “Do not skip classes, do not put your education in jeopardy, and if you

want to protest, fine, if you want to write letters to your congressman, do it, and a different—you know do it but still go to classes” because what happened at schools was all of a sudden, if there was a policy of free cut, your attendance didn’t matter, all of a sudden they imposed attendance policies and I think that occurred at Worcester State if my memory is correct. So I took his advice and it was very, very good advice because I didn’t jeopardize my education. There were students at every school in the country who started—got so involved in the strikes and in the political activity that they literally lost a whole semester because they failed to meet their, you know, obligations. And I’m not judging that, it just is what happened. So it was good advice but I joke with my husband now because he went to Clark University; Clark was always the place where you went for political activity and so I used to go over there and strike, you know, carry signs and so forth.

NM: And what kind of work does your husband do?

KO’C: My husb—my current husband is a hearings officer for the division of unemployment, so he’s very busy right now. And my previous husband was a professor at Holy Cross.

AH: Going back to the questions about work, how have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life?

KO’C: Well I have a lot of energy [laughter]. That’s a really good question, one of the most important things I was able to do, when my children were small, was to have daycare within my home. I was able to hire a caregiver, nanny, whatever—I never really called her a nanny but—a wonderful woman, who lived near me in Holden, and she came to my house and was able to take care of my children until my—when my husband wasn’t there, this is my late husband, and because he was a professor, he was also able to be home—he was able to schedule his time so that there were some days or afternoons he didn’t have classes or office hours. So I always had a lot of help, because I had a good income, I was able to hire someone which is very different from the challenges that women face, who have to, you know, bring their babies to a daycare center or something—it as a very different experience. That woman, whose name is Rita, is like a grandmother, and her husband, like a grandfather to my children they—they’ve been very close all these years so it was like hiring a family member, who still loves us and we still love her. And I was lucky to have friends and a large extended family to help with the children.

AH: How would you characterize the personal and professional costs of your chosen path? How about the benefits?

KO’C: Well, one of the—one of the places where I think women—or where I had challenges was the law profession is not equalized between men and women and that’s also one of the reasons why I’m in my own business. Men still dominate the legal

profession within larger firms in particular. I would say they, as a whole, make a lot more money, they have wives—they have wives to do their housekeeping, take care of their children and so forth so it's very different working in an environment where you're expected to work 70 hours a week, when it's the mother who has the children to go home to; it's very different. So what you—what I did feel that when I was working in that kind of an environment, and this isn't a reflection on that particular firm, it's what the expectations are, and especially if you're a new lawyer, you're expected to just be there as long as necessary, sometimes 11 o'clock at night. If the client's needs demanded it, you just had to do the work: weekends, Sunday mornings, and so during the time that I was working at that rate, even though I was so-called part-time because I was only working 45 hours, I would go home, sometimes eight o'clock at night and I had not seen my children since seven o'clock that morning. So you do feel that your—the balance is out of balance when that occurs. So there were times—there's always a—it's always a constant rebalancing act, I guess is the answer. So when I went into my own practice, it was easier to make my own decisions about where I wanted to be when, and on top of that, my husband became very ill, so I was taking care of him, taking care of the children, and running my own law practice. So there was a lot of rebalancing. You always feel like wherever I am, I should be in two other places.

AH: Do you consider yourself active, politically?

KO'C: I consider myself...participatory, I am not active in that I don't—it just is not where I've chosen to put my energy in terms of campaigning for a candidate. I think that I educate myself and I pay attention to political debate, which as a lawyer, I'm very fond of debate and the issues, I try to pay attention and I try to—I don't think I've ever not voted—maybe once, in the middle of a riot in Philadelphia, I didn't vote but other than that...

AH: Do you have a political affiliation?

KO'C: Yes, I am what I would consider a very liberal Democrat but I have—I listen to all sides and I have voted for Republicans if they're the right candidate and I've voted for a Republican president at one point: George W. no George H. not George W., The first one.

AH: Have you been involved in volunteer or community work?

KO'C: Very involved in my church community, unless that's a separate question--?

AH: It is.

KO'C: Oh okay, so community work is what you want me to focus on. I have been involved in various position over the many years as lawyers—lawyers are very often asked to participate in advisory boards, boards of directors, none profits, and things like

that. So I would say that's my primary participation on the community level but over the years I've been involved in Red Cross, in many agencies related to aging, PH Center, which doesn't exist anymore, and many elder services. Different agencies like that I've been on advisory boards or participating in one way or another. A lot of it connects to my work because I now work in the area of the state planning and doing a lot of work with older people. Housing, affordable housing boards and so forth, some of these don't exist anymore and so to name them wouldn't matter but—and right now I'm on the board of a nursing home, I have been for—I'm in my 10th year I think. So that involves meetings and so forth. I'm also on the advisory board for the Devereux School, which is a school for behaviorally and emotionally challenged students, it's located in Rutland but it draws from all over New England; so, I'm busy.

AH: What role has religion played in your life?

KO'C: I would say a large role. I was raised Roman Catholic and, you know, was encouraged to participate and that was a very prominent experience in my childhood. I think in college, I probably dropped out of religion. I think a lot of students do that and I don't think that most of my companions at that time were religious, I don't remember participating much, but I also had broad friendships so I remember having Jewish friends and going to their things and so forth and appreciating them. And, I guess when I grew up I, sort of, reclaimed that part of my life and, at one point after my second child was born I went from the Catholic Church to the Episcopal Church and I've been very happy to be part of that tradition and have been—that's been my major volunteer commitment and addition. I've been very active in our particular church and now I don't have too many official roles but I participate in a lot of different things.

AH: Have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

KO'C: Yes, significantly, my late husband was of declining health for about four years before he died. Not my own health, my own health has been fine but I've been a caregiver for him, my parents, for one other relative who is of my current husband so I would say yes. I've had very positive experiences, we've—our family has had very good doctors and luckily we've been able to acquire good health insurance. My biggest challenge was, when I was widowed and had two small children and my own business my health insurance cost, now this was about 10 years ago, my health insurance cost me \$775 a month because it was all out of pocket, it was through a small business association but because most people get their health insurance through larger employers and I didn't have the benefit of that, it was a huge cost but we had it.

AH: I am going to ask a few more open-ended questions here. How do you define success in your life? Has that definition changed over time?

KO'C: I think that I have been pretty successful over my life in avoiding other people's definition of success. I mean—I'll just give you an example, when I decided to leave

teaching, this was the one time I remember my father being very distressed with me because he felt I had reached this pinnacle of success as far as he was concerned and I was making a good living, you know, I had a wonderful job and he was very distressed when I said I wanted to go to law school and said that he could not support me in that. He didn't support my decision, and then was thrilled later, after I became a lawyer and realized it was a good decision, for me. But in the long—in my profession success very often is determined by belonging to a huge law firm and working under condition I described, you know: working 90 hours a week and everybody thinks lawyers make, you know, huge amounts of money but the fact is if you paid them by the hour—that they'd actually be making \$10 an hour for what they put into their week because you aren't paid for every hour of work, there's a tremendous of effort that goes into corollary activity. I can tell you don't believe me [laughs] but becoming a partner in a large law firm was never my idea of success. My idea of success in living is to have relationships with people which are meaningful. To feel that I'm helping people achieve something or be more comfortable or secure—whatever it is that I can do for them and family relationships are a priority which is why when I was describing trying to balance everything—I think you have to constantly review what path you're on and then take steps to see where it is you really want to go, not someone else's idea. So that if you choose to be an accountant that you decide how you want to do that and what feels good to you and that you don't have to make some exorbitant amount of money. It's never been a priority for me, so I think looking for balance, but with relationships being a priority, is success.

AH: How do you feel about the choices you've made in your life? Do you have any regrets, besides not going to Holy Cross? [laughter]

K'OC: Well I ended up marrying a man so I got to go to all the activities [laughs] later in life. I'd like to feel I don't have regrets because I think—every experience you have enriches you, whether it's a good or a bad—if it's a bad you don't do it again [laughs]. I'm very much an optimist so I don't dwell on regret, or I think—I don't regret, for example, going to Worcester State, or regret becoming a teacher. I don't regret—I really can't think of anything that I regret. I try to make the best out of whatever circumstances I'm—I find myself in.

AH: I think this should be the last question; based on your life experience, what advice would you give women of today and future generations?

K'OC: Well I think one is that I'd like them to appreciate what women have done before them and I have two daughters, so they and all their friends hear this speech from me all the time, but I think that because young women now are able to access all these opportunities, such as coming to—going to almost any college and playing on the sports teams and so forth to appreciate that that was not always the case just as I appreciate that, in the generation before me, women who went into teaching had to leave teaching the moment they got married, I don't know if you knew that—they couldn't teach, by law,

they could not teach because what was going to happen was they were going to get pregnant and that was not allowed. You were not allowed to be a married teacher in Massachusetts. So I appreciate what women did for me. There are things like, this may sound weird to a couple young men, but appreciate birth control. When I was—another tie into Clark University -- it was one of the centers of the controversy about allowing birth control in Massachusetts to non-married women. And it's huge—it's a huge thing that actually fermented in Worcester, and the pill was invented in—at the Worcester Experimental Foundation. That's made a huge difference in women's lives and in the lives of the men they care about. I think that women are not equal in the workplace and I think that this generation of women will be disappointed because I think that they think it is and it really isn't. There may be some places, I'm not saying across the board, I'm not saying in every profession, or in every corporate situation, it happens that my profession is one where women do not predominate, even though they're graduating from law schools now at a higher percentage but over the course of their career they're not leading the profession, it's not that they're not talented in it. So I—I don't discourage women for trying and—but it is a balancing act and you can't do it all and you have to make your decision about—on a periodic basis and on an ongoing basis between you and your partner, if you have one; who do we want to live? And, you can't expect it all and if you want to be at the top of your profession it may be that you can't have children and a family and all of it but you have to balance that and no one can tell you what it should be, you have to just make those decisions, and I think the women that are out there now, the young women, are doing wonderful things and they're going to continue to do it and they have freedoms that are just absolutely incredible.